

UC Regents Request Funds to Prevent Student Fee Increase

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The University of California Regents submitted a budget request to the state that did not include a projected increase for student fees for the 2009-10 student year.

The previous budget request had included an expected 9.4 percent increase in student fees, roughly amounting to a \$660 increase in fees for the 2009-10 academic year.

“We’re looking at a potential student fee increase if Gov. Schwarzenegger rejects our proposal,” said D’Artagnan Scorza, the current UC student regent.

The expected increase of 9.4 percent may only be the starting point for increasing student fees, but withholding a tuition fee increase in the UC budget has placed the burden on the state to decide whether the UC budget will have to charge students for the difference, which has been estimated at \$110 million.

“If we make our case appropriately, we may see a less significant fee increase,” Scorza said. “Is it likely that we’ll see less than a 10 percent [increase]? I don’t know, especially given the economic situation.”

Scorza noted that the UC system has already implemented cuts to alleviate the necessity to increase student fees.

“[The Regents] have taken some actions, including cutting administrative costs and cutbacks on

hiring,” Scorza said.

Scorza admitted that state officials are focused more on the state budget deficit than the plight of state-sponsored higher education.

“Most legislators, aside from Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, are more concerned about balancing the state budget [and providing for] health care for the elderly and other social programs that balance the state,” Scorza said. “They’re probably more concerned about the \$28 million budget deficit.”

Lt. Gov. Garamendi sees the motion as an important step in decreasing the burden of tuition on students.

“At my motion, we moved from a budget with a 10 percent fee increase to putting it on the state,” Garamendi mentioned. “Now, the legislators and [the] governor have to accept the burden of fee increase. It changes the nature of the debate.”

Garamendi said that he had been working to put the burden of increasing student fees on the state for some time.

“I’ve been fighting for two years to [implement] in the budget what I wanted with no student fees,” Garamendi stated.

Previously, he said, the regents and state would automatically vote for higher fees and ask the legislature to buy out the budget, which happened once in the last ten years.

The motion is mainly an effort to redistribute more of the burden of tuition on the state.

“Revenue [for tuition] should be raised from the California and general economy,” Garamendi said. “In the current year up to this fall, the only significant tax increase was a quarter-billion dollar tax increase on students [in higher education].”

To compare, Garamendi said that the only other significantly large tax was a \$20 million tax on yachts and airplanes.

Garamendi sees the motion as one step in the effort to preserve education as an investment for the future. “The future of the California economy is necessitated on [students],” Garamendi said. “The UC system has been on a slow stagnation in the last 15 years and [has] gotten to a point where [because of increased fees] we’re abandoning successful tradition and moving to weaker, exclusive higher education that is not open to someone who is prepared and intellectually capable.”

Scorza approved of the action that the board took on the matter.

“I do think the board did the right thing [in asking the state for more money] and I applaud their thoughtfulness,” Scorza said. “I think it is responsible because [if student fees increase] it will hurt access, diversity and enrollment in the UC schools.”

The regents’ next step will depend on the state’s proposed budget, which will be released in January, and whether it will include the required funds to prevent a student fee increase.

“The regents will respond to [the Governor’s budget] and see if a student fee raise is necessary,” Scorza explained.

This revised regent budget proposal will likely arrive in March or May, Scorza said. He added that the final budget outcome would be affected by the economic situation when the decision is made.

In the meantime, Lt. Gov. Garamendi encourages students to become active in resisting student fee increases.

“Students have to get engaged or student fees are likely to increase,” Garamendi said.